

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 05907 151219Z

44

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 DIWY-01 HEW-04 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 CU-02 SAJ-01

OMB-01 /077 W

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R 151040Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 207

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, TH

SUBJECT: HARA GARMENT STRIKE

REF: A) BANGKOK 1338 B) BANGKOK 2273

1. A LENGTHY STRIKE BY A GROUP OF WOMEN GARMENT MAKERS ENDED WHEN POLICE MARCH 13 ARRESTED THRITY-TWO STRIKERS AND NINE UNIVERSITY STUDENT SUPPORTERS. THE STRIKE AT ONE OF HARA GARMENT COMPANY'S (A THAI ETHNIC CHINESE ENTITY) THREE BANGKOK PLANTS BEGAN OVER A RELATIVELY MINOR GRIEVANCE IN OCTOBER 1975. THE ARREST OF FORTY-ONE WORKERS AND STUDENT SUPPORTERS AND POLICE ACTION IN REMOVING STRIKERS FROM THE WORKER OCCUPIED PLANT HAS GIVEN RISE TO EXTENSIVE PRESS COVERAGE, VOCAL STUDENT AND LABOR PROTESTATIONS AND THE SCHEDULING OF RALLIES IN SUPPORT OF THE INCARCERATED WOMEN.

2. THE HARA GARMENT STRIKE BEGAN LAST OCTOBER WHEN MANAGEMENT REFUSED TO PAY EMPLOYEES FOR WORK LOST DUE TO POWER FAILURE. THE INTRASIGEANCE OF MANAGEMENT AND THE UNSATISFACTORY WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS AT THE PLANT SOON GAVE RISE TO MORE EXTENSIVE EMPLOYEE DEMANDS. THE LABOR COORDINATION CENTER OF THAILAND (LCC) A LEFTIST STUDENT RUN WORKER

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PAGE 02 BANGKO 05907 151219Z

ADVISORY CENTER, ALONG WITH UNAFFILIATED STUDENT SUPPORTERS

TOOK CHARGE OF THE STRIKE. WORKERS UNWILLING TO CONTINUE THE STRIKE WENT BACK TO WORK AT OTHER HARA PLANTS WHILE THE LCC ASSISTED A HARDCORE GROUP OF STRIKERS IN ESTABLISHING A "WORKERS UNITY FACTORY." THE STRIKERS REFUSED TO VACATE THE PLANT AND BEGAN SEWING JEANS AND DENIM JACKETS FOR SALE AT PRICES BELOW THOSE OF THE "UNLIBERATED" MAIN PLANTS. EXTENSIVE INTERNATIONAL AND THAI-LANGUAGE PRESS COVERAGE GLAMORIZED THE PLIGHT OF THE YOUNG WORKERS.

3. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, ON MARCH 12 DEPUTY MINISTER OF INTERIOR BUNLOET LOETPRICHA ORDERED POLICE TO ARREST STRIKERS WHO HAD SEIZED CONTROL OF THE HARA AND COLGATE-PALMOLIVE PLANTS (COMMENT: THE COLGATE-PALMOLIVE DISPUTE ENDED SEVERAL WEEKS AGO WITHOUT POLICE INTERVENTION.) SATURDAY MORNING A GROUP OF STUDENTS AND WORKERS SUPPORTING THE STRIKE WHO HAD SOUGHT AN EXPLANATION OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT WERE ARRESTED BY POLICE FOR BLOCKING THE GATE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S RESIDENCE. AT THE SAME TIME RIOT POLICE REMOVED STRIKERS STILL AT THE PLANT. STUDENT AND LABOR LEADERS HAVE EXPRESSED SUPPORT OF THE JAILED WOMEN AND HAVE BEGUN THE RITUAL OF DISTRIBUTING LEAFLETS AND HOLDING PUBLIC RALLIES IN SUPPORT OF THESE LATEST "VICTIMS OF THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT.

4. COMMENT: ONCE AGAIN THE TIMING AND ORCHESTRATION OF STRONG RTG ACTION HAS PLAYED INTO THE HANDS OF THOSE OPPOSING THAT ACTION. BY ANNOUNCING POLICE PLANS TO ARREST TRESPASSING STRIKERS, STRIKE SUPPORTERS WERE ABLE TO SEIZE THE ROLE OF PEACEFUL PROTESTORS INTENT ON PRESENTING THEIR CASE TO THE PRIME MINISTER. THE LONG INITIAL PERIOD OF RTG INACTIVITY HAD ALLOWED THE LCC AND STUDENT SUPPORTERS, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL AND THAI-LANGUAGE PRESS, TO CREATE THE IMAGE OF A GROUP OF ENTERPRISING MARTYRS INTENT ONLY ON DESTROYING CLASS EXPLOITATION. IN ANOTHER VEIN, THE ARREST OF THE STRIKERS FOLLOWING CLOSE ON THE HEELS OF THE INTERIOR MINISTRY ORDER TO ARBITRATE THE SIAM CEMENT GROUP STRIKE MAY INDICATE A MORE AGGRESSIVE POSTURE BY THE RTG IN THE ENDLESS SERIES OF LABOR DISPUTES.

WHITEHOUSE

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 05907 151219Z

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